Planning Methodology in the Twenty-First Century

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ABSTRACT
The concept of 'planning' has evolved in the last decades from a set of activities principally executed by professionals - both planners, other experts and decision-makers - and justified by referring to scientific principles, to different sets of activities executed by a multiplicity of different actors and justified by referring to consensus of opinions or democratic or economic power. Consequently, planning has become much more complicated and there are grounds to justify that this complexity will even increase in the next century.
This paper will address the question whether the increasing complexity of planning affects planning methodology, both on a meta level - i.e. the organisation of planning itself - and on the level of the planner's toolbox, i.e. the equipment that a practising planner may use in the 21st century. This question will be discussed from four different angles: planning as an intellectual process, as an organizational process, as a political-administrative process and as a social process. It will be argued that a planner in the 21st century can not restrict his or her's view to one of these angles, but that knowledge and skills should encompass the full spectrum.

1. Introduction

The title 'Planning Methodology in the 21st Century' includes at least two assumptions. The first one is that the 'act of public planning', as well as the methods employed, change over time due to societal changes. This assumption is debatable, but it is empirically supported by the methodological changes that have taken place in planning practise during the last decades (e.g. see Healey, 1996). The second assumption is that there are fundamental societal changes ahead of us, which we have to understand in order to be incorporated in public planning. A Chinese proverb teaches us that 'to know the road ahead, ask those coming back'. Unfortunately, planners who want to learn about the future can not use such a basic empirical survey method. We can only consult widely available long-term views of 'visionaries', such as Toffler (1980), Kennedy (1993) and Minkin (1995) or, alternatively, do our own creative thinking. In both ways the inevitable conclusion will be that our society indeed undergoes rapid changes, with an enlargement of scale of many social and economic activities, that are evoked by continuous technological developments resulting in seemingly never ending processes of miniaturization and automation of production facilities. As a consequence, more and more human activities will become 'footloose', i.e. not specifically related to a certain geographical location. Of course, this affects the *content* of spatial planning, but in which sense does it also influence spatial planning *methodology*? The purpose of this paper is to explore this question.

The expression 'planning methodology' has been used in many different ways by various planners, that it has never commanded a clear and unambiguous meaning. Without elaborating on this theme, here we follow Peter Hall's simple but effective description that in its most general sense 'planning' means to 'take thought to determine an action or a series of actions beforehand' (cf. Hall, 1970, p. 1). The notion of 'methodology' is used here in a broad sense as 'a system of principles and procedures'.

In this paper planning is not seen as a 'one-step' activity like drawing a plan, but it is conceived as a process of institutional and individual interaction during which a wide range of areas of policy choice are explored and decided upon. These planning processes are shaped within given constraints by power relations between the various actors involved, such as individuals, groups and institutions. In the next sections the development of planning methodology will be discussed along the lines of four different dimensions of planning (see Voogd, 1995), i.e. planning as a social process (section 2), as a political-administrative process (section 3), as an organizational process (section 4) and as an intellectual process (section 5). The paper is finished by some concluding remarks.

2. Planning as a Social Process

It is obvious that the question of planning methodology can not be dissociated from the social problems that spatial planning is supposed to address in the future. Although no one is really privileged to the specifics of the 21st century since we are still in the 20th century, visionaries like Minkin (1995) provide plausible information to believe that many social issues in the next century are already with us. Concepts like '*global community*' or '*global economy*' are no abstract notions any more but their characteristics can be traced everywhere. It is also easy to believe that our PC will become 1000 times more powerful

than today. No doubt, also electronic communication will continue to show a rapid acceleration in the future.
Evidently, the ongoing electronic revolution means that we need a new way of looking at 'space'. For many social groups and organisations that are able to pay the price of the new technology spatial proximity may become less important. No doubt there will also be an 'underclass' that does not have the means to escape from geographical boundaries. The people who are victimized by the information revolution, who are being pushed out and excluded from production. It will depend on the moral values of future generations, whether those communities are being organized so that planning can be a starting point for progressive change. Evidently, this implies that many current urban problems will also continue in the next century, see also Gottdiener (1986) and Dow (1996). Evidently, this can be dealt with in a mitigating way, which means more or less a social acceptance of a continuation of 'the urban crisis'. However, other avenues may be chosen in future to give cities new meanings, for example by focusing on urban heritage planning and urban tourism: see Ashworth (1992), Ashworth c.s. (1995) and Page (1995).
The relaxation of many geographical constraints may increase the *freedom of action* of most actors in a public planning process. It is likely that this changes the role of government, especially local government (see section 3). Governments will be more aware of the *market context* within which their activities occur. Rather than focusing entirely on 'regulating' public behaviour, the current tendency of focusing more and more on *incentive planning* may be even emphasized in the next century (see Ashworth & Voogd, 1990). This may imply that social '*will-shaping*', i.e. the creation of a common social opinion, will receive more explicit attention in planning methodology (e.g. see also Smith, 1982; Majone, 1989; Voogd, 1997a).
There is a general feeling that the future urban society will be more fragmented that today (e.g. see Mommaas, 1996). This 'social variety' will create more uncertainty for the planning authorities, which may be encountered on the one hand by increased citizen participation, and on the other hand by paying more attention in government to *strategic planning*, especially the detection of important issues and social and environmental changes (see also section 5).
Future *citizens participation* in planning will no doubt be influenced my new technological means, such as new video techniques, local media and the Internet. However, it is questionable whether this will actually improve the process of citizens participation since the abundance of information that can be supplied by the new media may not be easily 'digested' by everyone. Besides, not all citizens may have equal access to new information sources, which may hamper the use of new technologies. Much more research into this interesting field of social involvement in planning processes, and especially in relation to the consequences of new technology, is necessary.
Evidently, planning does not exist in a social vacuum. Its results are shaped not only by power relations internal to the planning network, but also by a variety of contextual constraints: social, political, economical and technological. These constraints are themselves, in part at least, the result of wider power relations that are shaped, at least partially, by political-administrative processes. In the next section this will be elaborated.

3. Planning as a Political-Administrative Process

Public planning is also a political-administrative process. Important issues from this angle of incidence are, among others, the control of public authority over individuals, groups and institutions (e.g. see Forester, 1989), consensus-building (e.g. see Healey, 1993), negotiation and will-shaping (e.g. see Susskind and Cruikshank, 1987) and persuasion (e.g. see Jowett and O'Donnell, 1992). Seen from these angles, planning has changed considerably in the last decade. Many public authorities have discovered marketing and communication techniques to attract private investments (see Ashworth & Voogd, 1990, 1994). Similar communication techniques are also being used by governments to oppress counter-forces of those with different opinions.

Academic planners in Western Europe seem more and more convinced that the political-administrative dimension of planning should be a process of facilitating community collaboration for consensus-building (e.g. see Balducci & Fareri, 1996; Healey *et al.*, 1995; Woltjer, 1996). New approaches are now being advocated, and sometimes also followed, that suggest a fundamental break with the planning methodology of the past. According to Healey (1996) the planning community therefore needs to engage in vigorous debate and research on the forms and methodologies of this new situation.

The relations between participants of the political process have been changed over the past decennia and, no doubt, this tendency will continue in the next century. The growing welfare and increasing individualism have disillusioned many citizens with political parties. The current *'representative democracy'* seems to be more and more under fire. The rise in general levels of education has made many citizens less slavish followers of 'party views' and the number of floating voters has increased considerably. Political parties will more and more adapt to this situation. By using the full arsenal of marketing techniques they are now trying to attract the necessary voters. Abstract ideologies are already no longer seen as appropriate for selling <political products'. A fundamental discussion is no <news' and not suitable for television. The competitive struggle for the voters in this - for political parties - <post-ideological age' is now done by focusing on fragmented wishes of the electorate and by creating a favourable public image for the party's spokesman. This is a game of <Old Maid': the most important task of politicians seems to be avoiding mistakes that may harm their public image and at the same time pointing at <obvious' mistakes by others. Hence, public opinion has become a very dominant factor in political decision-making and there are no reasons to believe that this will change in the 21st century. Political debate is often already reduced to exchanging a couple of <one liners', suitable for broadcasting at <prime time news'. Politicians are on their guard. While society is becoming more and more complex, they are taking care not to burn their fingers by complex societal problems. For such problems often involve unpopular measures and this may harm their career. This results in a paradoxical situation that if politicians go their own way based on ideological motives, they are accused of not listening to their voters, and if they follow public opinion they become impotent. In both cases traditional <party politics' is losing ground. Hence, there is talk of <a gap' between citizens and politicians. This gap can be seen as the main cause of the crippled functioning of democracy.

Obviously, this experience is not the same for countries like the USA, which traditionally have a decentralised, more liberal, planning system, which is 'dominated by working class realists with a low regard for missionaries' (cf. Dyckman, 1961). Also in the 'pre-Habermas period', i.e. before his major work had been translated into English, much planning-oriented literature was published in the USA that stressed the importance of

social pluralism and bargaining (e.g. see Dahl & Lindblom, 1953). This is not surprising for a country where democracy appears to have degenerated to 'Hollywood show level' and where legal bribery exists since interest groups actually can buy political attention and political favours. For European outsiders it is fascinating to see how 'left-wing' European ideologies from the sixties are linked with this 'capitalist' market democracy. It has resulted in many new ideas about communicative planning - for example see Fischer & Forester (1993), Innes (1996), Faludi & Korthals Altes (1997).

The widespread renewed introduction in Western Europe of, what I prefer to call the *communicative ideology* in public planning (cf. Voogd, 1996), seems stimulated by the fundamental societal changes as discussed above. The growing social complexity needed a new - but simple - philosophy by which people come to terms with the world around them. This is an ideology, being pervasive sets of ideas, beliefs and images that groups employ to make the world more intelligible to themselves. Hall (1977) asserts that an ideology only operates by being openly embedded in commonsense wisdom. It is commonsense wisdom in the Netherlands, and probably elsewhere, that public discussions between political parties are more and more replaced by discussions between interest groups. Discussions, that are often fed by - or based on - one-sided research outcomes and normative expert views. Representative democracy is clearly changing into *participatory democracy*.

The magic word for narrowing down the gap between 'citizens and politicians', and embraced by all actors in this play, is called *communication*. Evidently, 'good communication' is a goal that is giving everybody warm feelings given the 'inclusionary ethic which underpins the approach' (cf. Healey, 1996). Political parties, governmental bodies, interest groups, now all stress the importance of communication, leaving the innocent citizen with an avalanche of 'news letters' and invitations for 'information evenings' and 'open days'. Promotion, persuasion and propaganda have been discovered as communication tools. Marketing has become an ordinary public planning concept, but also other institutional groups are using its techniques (Ashworth & Voogd, 1990, 1994).

Clearly, the communicative ideology is providing a new paradigm to government, where facts seem to be replaced by values. Very often values of those who have the money and the power. This may seem accurate and acceptable if we want to see 'planning methodology' as a copy of 'planning practice'. But unacceptable if we believe that also in the next century a major reason for planning should be the protection and improvement of environmental quality and quality of life for all of us, and not just the limited interests of the 'happy few' who are invited, or who are able, to enter the 'communicative arena'. Also in the 21st century, in public administration there will be a need and a place for 'pragmatic rationality' (Verma, 1996) different from 'communicative rationality' (Innes, 1996). This will be clearly visible by viewing planning as an organizational process.

4. Planning as an Organizational Process

Many different actors are involved in planning. These actors are somehow, directly or indirectly, interrelated. These interrelationships may be compared with a *network*. In network theory links, connections and interaction are seen especially essential. The mechanisms through which planning networks operate determine, in part at least, what problems are handled, what type of spatial policies governments are putting forward to

tackle them, and what chances these policies have of being implemented (see also Martins, 1986).
Although the behaviour of actors within networks may not be explained in rational terms, the specification of networks no doubt always remains an act of rational behaviour. This is obvious, since network theory has close resemblance to systems theory with the exception of terminology (Voogd, 1995).
The *social network* paradigm has gained recognition in social, political and economic sciences as the theoretical basis for examining social structures. A social network can consist of people or firms or institutions. This theory has been clearly defined by many theorists from various social disciplines and it has been convincingly applied to important substantive problems. A rough distinction can be made between applications that focus on a quantitative, more formal, treatment of network structures (e.g. see Wasserman & Faust, 1994; Wasserman & Galaskiewicz, 1994), and a more qualitative approach focusing on an understanding of the dynamics of policy-making processes (Scharpf, 1978; Teisman, 1992; Klijn, 1996). Especially the latter approach appears to be useful for understanding the mechanisms, possibilities and limitations of planning (see also Elander, 1995).
It can be speculated that in the 21st century the organizational angle of planning will be more and more focusing on planning networks. A social network is becoming a *planning network* if it is used for selectively involving and activating certain actors. Such a planning network can be typified by the following components (Hufen & Ringeling, 1990):

- a set of actors (individuals, groups, institutions);
- the interests, wishes and goals of these actors;
- the activities en problem fields, with regard to the actors have interests and/or goals;
- the rules, norms and assumptions that determine the actions of, and interactions between the actors;
- the set of action and interaction possibilities of each actor;
- the set of expected outcomes, costs and benefits of each action and interaction.

The interactions in a regional planning network are varied in nature (e.g. see Martins, 1986). It can involve *resources transfer*, that is the exchange and/or appropriation of resources between actors. Another type of interactions are called *volitive communications* (cf. Scharpf, 1978). These include offers, demands, commands and their acceptance. There are also interactions that can be explained in terms of *organisational mobilisation of bias.* By this it is meant that administrative routines tend consistently to favour certain actors at the expense of others. The last type of relationship can also bear the danger that it operations not only in terms of favouring certain actors to the detriment of others, but also in terms of concentrating attention on certain problems and solutions to the detriment of others (Martins, 1986).
Planning networks are seldomly stable. Dependent on the problem, each time new partners and new linkages are created and old linkages are weakened. For instance, investors have to be interested and attracted, which involves a different pattern of relationships then after the investment has occurred. Hence, a planning network is dynamic. The position and power of many actors, including governmental authorities, will vary over time. This implies that the old paradigm on the role of the government, being a dominant decision-maker, may not be realistic any more in the 21st century. Although governmental agencies will still be aiming at coordination, other actors may have the decisive power to induce the

desired changes. It is essential for a government to know who these actors are and how they can be influenced. These characteristics make the network 'paradigm' very suitable to cope with dynamic organizational settings in the 21st century.

5. Planning as an Intellectual Process

In the introductory section Peter Hall was quoted saying that in its most general sense 'planning' means to 'take thought to determine an action or a series of actions beforehand'. Indeed, planning aims at thoughtful preparation of policy-making and policy-implementing actions regarding the purposeful intervention in market processes and the organisation of these interventions. Hence, planning can also be regarded as an intellectual process, which is also called *intelligent planning* by Wyatt (1989). According to him '*intelligent planning must be that which is maximally 'salient', maximally 'smart' and maximally 'sympathetic'. (...) After they 'Think' intelligent planners should absorb salient information about their problem. They should then 'Analyse' pertinent features of the prevailing situation and 'Aspire', along with the community, in order to absorb the latter's dominant goals and priorities. They should then 'Suggest' various plans in order to learn, in a 'smart' way, about the various available options. They then need to 'Test' such options in order to learn about their probable consequences. Finally, intelligent planners should reason sympathetically in order to 'Evaluate' alternative strategies and to then 'Select' the best plan from within this favoured strategy.* (Wyatt, 1989, p. 6).

Intellectual activities of planners have to regard not only the 'desirable' actions, by government or any other actor, but also the processes or social structures that may evoke those actions. This implies that the 'toolbox' of a spatial planner should include a large variety of methods. A major part of this intellectual equipment will also be used by 'non spatial' planners, policy scientists, geographers, economists and experts from other disciplines. Will these methods change in the next century?

No doubt, due to social and technological changes a planner in the 21st century will operate in a more international environment that he/she is operating today. The top-down approaches from the past, where very often 'groups of actors' and centralized computer systems have determined the selection, use and mode of operation of methods, will be replaced by much more personal approaches associated with a bottom-up style of planning.

Of course, all this must influence planning methodology. On the one hand there will be an 'upgrading' of traditional analytical planning methods by adapting some of these to the use of modern technological instruments. For instance, many functions and methodological components of current *Geographic Information Systems* are in essence classic tools, but combined in a computer system much more powerful than they could ever be as an isolated method in the pre-computer age. It is speculated that the further development of graphics, distributed processing and Internet communications will embrace many traditionally separate planning functions (cf. Batty, 1995). The growing availability of modern 'user friendly' technology for purposes of analysis and communication in the 21st century will certainly invite academic planners and others to search for new methods, e.g. methods that use *artificial intelligence* (e.g. see Barbanente et al., 1992). But on the other hand, the tendency towards a more 'communicative planning' may also imply in some areas of planning the demise of less 'transparent' methods, such as formal *evaluation techniques* (e.g. Voogd, 1997b).

The new social issues that will emerge in the next century due to a relaxation of many geographical constraints will also imply the use of methodologies based on *uncertainty management*. The high speed and magnitude of many social changes call for flexible 'non formal' methods, such as '*Delphi-inspired*' approaches (e.g. Masser & Foley, 1987; Woudenberg, 1991), issues management (e.g. Renfro, 1993) and environmental scanning (e.g. Renfro & Morrison, 1984, Amara, 1991).

6. Some concluding remarks

It is apparent from the previous sections that the question of defining a planning methodology for the 21st century can not be dissociated from the problems planning is supposed to address. Many issues in the agenda of spatial planning in the decades ahead are already with us today, such as the improvement of the existing housing stock and urban environment of large and declining cities, the treatment of economic and social problems associated with unemployment and poverty, the modernisation of ageing infrastructures and the stimulation of technologically advanced activities.
If we consider today's literature on planning theory, we may be inclined to conclude that communicative planning will be the dominating paradigm for the 21st century (see for instance Healey, 1996). However, the protection of the natural environment and the prevention of further environment degradation calls in my opinion for a strong leadership of planning. It is questionable whether these paramount topics can be best served by this paradigm. Garnering public acceptance through public 'discourses' often involves a professional dilemma of choosing between the morally questionable shaping of public preferences and the surrendering of complex choices to public biases (Kartez, 1989).
Planning methodology in the 21st century is an intriguing topic because the only information we have is speculation and the experiences from today. Many of the ideas in this paper are based on experiences in Western Europe, but even within today's Europe we may notice important differences between countries in political and organizational environments. Some countries with a strong planning tradition may show a different development path in the 21st century with respect to planning methodology than in countries where politics is truly to the fore or where there is great ambiguity and confusion about the role of planning. Also today we may witness that in latter countries planners are often primary focusing on planning as an intellectual process, playing the role of an 'independent scientific advisor', whereas planners in countries with a planning tradition nowadays seem to be more inclined to emphasize administrative and organizational processes. Given the growing complexity and internationalization of societies in the 21st century, the question should be raised whether this differentiation within the planning profession, resulting in planners with different skills and methodologies, should be accepted or dealt with. It is my opinion that a planner in the 21st century can not restrict his or her's view to one of the four angles of planning described in this paper, but that knowledge and skills should encompass the full spectrum. If not, it may not only harm the harmonization of spatial planning at a European level, but it will also endanger the future of planning discipline, since its distinction from other related academic disciplines involved in spatial policy-making will then be minimal.

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